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Tetrabromobisphenol-A (TBBPA) Biotransformation in Vegetated and Non-Vegetated Salt Marsh Sediments

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ABSTRACT

Anthropogenic impacts and differences in the belowground biomass of vegetation may potentially select for sediment microbial communities with different biogeochemical functional capabilities. This study compared the ability of *Spartina alterniflora*, *Phragmites australis*, and unvegetated sediments to transform the organic contaminant tetrabromobisphenol A (TBBPA) to bisphenol-A (BPA). Samples were obtained from both contaminated and non-contaminated field systems and from plants growing in the Rutgers University greenhouse. Anaerobic microcosms were incubated in the dark at 28°C for 15 days. The rate of TBBPA debromination was significantly higher in *Spartina* sediments compared to the *Phragmites* and non-vegetated treatments. Microbial community structure was compared using phospholipid fatty acid (PLFA) analysis. Small, but significant differences appear to be related to the influence of the vegetation interacting with site-specific factors.



Fig. 1. Belowground biomass of field sampled plants. *Spartina* fine root volume is much greater than *Phragmites*, while *Phragmites* rhizome volume is much greater than *Spartina*.

BACKGROUND

Microbiota and macrophyte species are affected by the presence of contaminants, which may select for a particular microbial community composition (3). Plant species differ in rhizosphere carbon transport (4). Microbial community composition and function responds to changes in the plant community (2). Naturally occurring phenolic compounds are released by plant roots (5). Morphology and biomass of *Phragmites* and *Spartina* root systems differ substantially (1). Microbial community structure can be inferred from the presence of phospholipid fatty acids (PLFAs) (4).

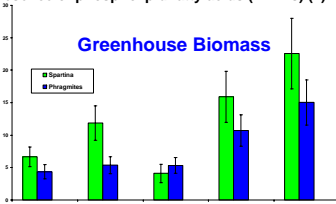


Fig. 2. Plant biomass in g dry weight for shoots, fine roots, rhizomes, total belowground, and total plant. *Spartina* fine roots were significantly greater than *Phragmites*.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

FIELD SAMPLES

- Transects were set up within monospecific populations of each plant species
- Three replicate cores were extracted from each plot
- Cores were divided into 10 cm subsections and frozen at -20°C for PLFA analysis
- Sediment blocks were excavated to determine belowground biomass



ANAEROBIC MICROCOSMS

- Anaerobic microcosms were established using 50 g fresh sediment and 50 ml methanogenic media
- Microcosms were incubated with TBBPA (225-275 µM)
- Loss of TBBPA and formation of BPA were determined by HPLC analysis.
- Fatty acids were extracted from samples, and the lipid fraction was obtained through separation on a silicic acid column, and methylated following MIDI protocols.
- Identification of individual fatty acids was determined based on GC retention time using the MIDI Sherlock Microbial Identification System.

GREENHOUSE SAMPLES

- Phragmites* rhizomes and *Spartina* shoots were incubated in the Rutgers University greenhouse
- Rhizosphere sediment samples were transferred to anaerobic microcosms as above.

Field Belowground Biomass

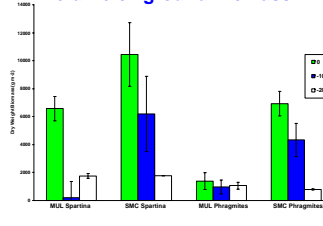


Fig. 3. Plant biomass in g dry weight for field samples from Saw Mill Creek and Mullica. *Spartina* belowground biomass was greater than that of *Phragmites*, and biomass was greater for both species in the contaminated SMC system than in the MUL plants.

RESULTS

BPA Formation

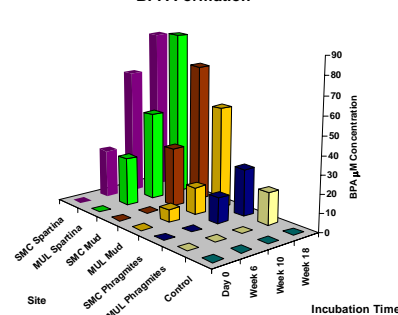


Fig. 4. Formation of BPA from field samples over an 18 week incubation period. Rate and extent of *Spartina* biotransformation was greater than that of both *Phragmites* and non-vegetated treatments.

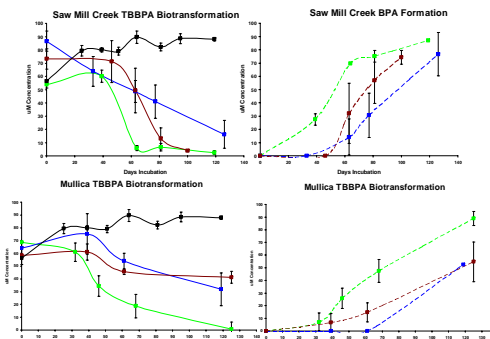
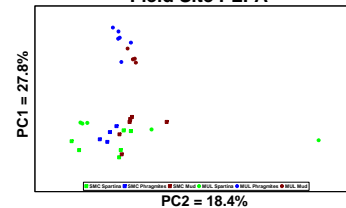


Fig. 5. Anaerobic biotransformation of TBBPA to the end product BPA over a period of up to 125 days incubation. Loss of TBBPA and formation of BPA occurred at a faster rate in the *Spartina* microcosms than in *Phragmites* or non-vegetated mud treatments.

Principal Components Analysis

Field Site PLFA



Greenhouse PLFA

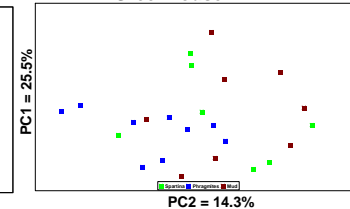


Fig. 6. Principal Components Analysis of PLFA from field and greenhouse samples. The MUL site shows a separation between *Spartina* and the *Phragmites* and non-vegetated samples. There is no such separation in the SMC samples. The greenhouse appears to have a *Phragmites* cluster, but no cluster for the *Spartina* or mud treatments.

CONCLUSIONS

- Spartina alterniflora* belowground biomass was significantly greater than *Phragmites australis* belowground biomass under field conditions
- Formation of *Spartina* fine roots was significantly greater than *Phragmites* fine root formation under greenhouse conditions
- Sediments associated with *Spartina alterniflora* from all sites dehalogenated TBBPA at a faster rate than sediments associated with *Phragmites australis* or non-vegetated mud
- The contaminated site microbial communities produced BPA at a faster rate than the non-contaminated site microbial communities
- PCA revealed significant differences in microbial fatty acids in the non-contaminated Mullica samples. These differences were not found in sediment microbial populations from the contaminated Saw Mill Creek site
- The *Phragmites* greenhouse sediments appear to form a PCA cluster, but no cluster was apparent in the *Spartina* or non-vegetated treatments
- A correlation between PLFA sediment profiles and the ability of a microbial community to biotransform TBBPA was not observed in this study

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